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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the need for the integration of language and business studies to enhance successful implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement. For college and university graduates to deal effectively with French-Canadian and Mexican business people and consumers, they must be exposed to their languages and their cultures. This exposure could come, in part, from jointly teaching courses in business studies and language studies, such as Principles of Marketing, Humar Resource Management, Consumer Behavior, Commercial French, and Spanish Culture. Such joint efforts might require that educators engage in further study in deficient areas, through university courses, international internships, international travel, and language and business educators working with one another on a continuing basis. Once business and language educators are able to team teach such courses, they can develop a curriculum and individual courses that guarantee a truly integrated academic experience. Internships for international business or international studies students are another method of increasing cultural awareness. International business and international studies programs should also build international negotiation skills, perhaps by conducting mock negotiations in either French or Spanish. (JDD)

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PAPERS ON INTERNATIONALIZING BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

TOWARD THE SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NORTH AMERICAN FREE-TRADE AGREEMENT: THE INTEGRATION OF LANGUAGE AND BUSINESS STUDIES

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TOWARD THE SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NORTH AMERICAN FREE-TRADE AGREEMENT: THE INTEGRATION OF LANGUAGE AND BUSINESS STUDIES

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It is very likely that some version of the North American Free-Trade Agreement will be passed within the next few years. This paper examines the urgent need for the integration of language and business studies if such an agreement is to be implemented successfully. Many Canadians are already bilingual in French and English, and many Mexicans are presently fluent in both Spanish and English. Although the situation is improving in the United States because of the development of many international business or international trade programs by our colleges and universities, too few U.S. students are capable of writing and speaking in any other language than English. Fewer still have a good understanding of the French and British influences upon Canadian culture, and of the Hispanic and native tribal influences upon Mexican culture.

This paper also presents strategies by which language and business studies can be integrated in the United States to permit a more effective implementation of the North American Free-Trade Agreement. Areas of specific focus will include the importance of conversational language, commercial language (to include the development of specific international negotiation skills), and cultural patterns of behavior within Canada, Mexico, and the U.S. Each of these areas will be explored as they pertain to strengthening international trade alliances, to promoting better cross-cultural understanding, and to seeking a better global perspective of the marketplace.

The North-American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) will likely create the largest market in the world, with more than 370 million consumers and over $6.5

trillion of production. This larger market will help U.S. products to be more competitive in global markets with Europe, Asia, and the rest of the world, and will result in the creation of millions of new jobs within the United States alone in such areas as manufacturing, business sales, retailing, and physical distribution.

U.S. educators in both modern languages and business administration have an unparalleled opportunity to begin preparing students to assume these new NAFTA-related jobs. If college and university graduates are to deal effectively with French-Canadian and Mex[illegible] businesspeople and consumers, they must have been thoroughly exposed to both their languages and their cultures.

Most U.S. colleges and universities are currently offering both international business management courses and commercial and conversational language course in French and Spanish. Unfortunately, even in international business majors and programs on these campuses, business and language courses remain separate and conducted as the sole province of the academic department offering a particular course. The philosophy behind the curricula of many international business programs is to provide students with exposure to business, foreign languages, and foreign cultures. The desired result, of course, is that the individual student is able to knit all of these separate parts of the curriculum into a meaningful understanding of the global community. As nice as this approach might sound, it rarely works other than on paper. How then, can U.S. educators in business and modern languages work together to make what sounds good on paper into a real world reality?

First, business and language educators must not yield to issues of turf and separation. There are many courses in both business studies and language studies

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that can be jointly taught. Some examples here would be Principles of Management, Principles of Marketing, Human Resource Management, and Consumer Behavior, from business studies; and Commercial French, Commercial Spanish, French culture courses, and Spanish culture courses, from language studies. Of course, the business professor should have some proficiency in French or Spanish, and some cultural understanding of French-Canadians and Mexicans, as the case may be. In turn, the language professor needs to have at least a fundamental understanding of U.S. management and marketing practices, and their relationship to commercial practices in either Quebec or Mexico. Certainly, such joint efforts might require that the educators involved be willing to engage in further study in those areas where they are currently deficient. Such further study might require taking formal college or university courses, international internships (possibly undertaken while on a sabbatical leave), international travel, and language and business educators working with one another on a continuing basis. Once business and language educators are able to team-teach courses, they can develop a curriculum and individual courses that guarantee that the international business or international studies' student will have a truly integrated academic experience. The workability of this concept is only compromised by the unwillingness of the faculty involved to prepare themselves properly for such an undertaking. After such a curriculum has been developed and put into place, faculty can be recruited who already have such a background.

An interesting and practical way to provide language and business faculty who are capable of team-teaching courses within international business programs is by U.S. colleges and universities participating in faculty exchange programs with both French-Canadian and Mexican universities. French-Canadian and Mexican

business professors will already have mastery of their native languages and cultures and can easily work with U.S. students in this regard. These same professors can also be useful in working with U.S. business and language professors who would like to increase their proficiency on language and their understanding of a particular culture. The native-born U.S. business and language educators who teach in Quebec and/or Mexico can not only increase their own language proficiency and cultural understanding, but they can also assist their French-Canadian (less likely) and Mexican (more likely) counterparts in improving their oral and written expression in English and their understanding of U.S. culture. U.S. business and language educators can also polish their speaking and understanding of French-Canadian and Mexican commercial language and conversational language.

Whether or not a student is involved in an international business or international studies program, he/she can experience an internship in either Quebec or Mexico. There are a large number and variety of businesses in both Quebec and Mexico that are more than willing to invest in the success of NAFTA via providing internship experiences for interested U.S. students. There are also many U.S. companies with operating divisions or ventures in Quebec and/or Mexico. These companies also have opportunities to offer interested U.S. students. These internships must be carefully developed so as to expose the student to both the language and culture of the country. There must be ample opportunities for the student to become more proficient with the language and to interact with the local businesspeople and consumers. The intern must be supervised and evaluated by individuals who are aware of, and committed to, the specific goals of the internship.

In addition to seeking internships in Quebec and Mexico, U.S. students can gain a great deal from internships with U.S. companies who trade heavily with Quebec and/or Mexico. These students can work in international departments within these companies, where they would gain experience in translation, international communication, and business techniques and practices utilized in transacting business with Quebec and Mexico.

Finally, international business and international studies programs in the United States should include the building of international negotiation skills in both business and commercial language courses. Mock international negotiations have been found to be an excellent means to reinforce the student's cultural awareness of another country and another people. U.S. students must be exposed to interesting and meaningful ways by which to reduce their provincialism. Conducting these mock negotiations in either French or Spanish would further serve to prepare the student for the realities he/she is likely to encounter in working with French-Canadian and/or Mexican businesspeople and consumers.

Because some form of the North-American Free-Trade Agreement is surely to pass and be implemented in the next decade, international business programs within U.S. colleges and universities must begin right now to prepare students for the opportunities and challenges they will inevitably face in such a business environment. Those educational institutions who offer their students such an integrated academic program as this paper suggests will certainly be on the cutting edge of international business education.